

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

December 17, 2017

The Work in the Waiting

Joel Schmidgall

Well, hey Merry Christmas, can I say that? I guess not, you all didn't say anything back. I'll try again. Merry Christmas {response} Merry Christmas! There we go, you guys are so responsive, man. Well, it's good to be here.

You know I really did not realize when you have one of your kids enter into middle school how much time consumption that actually takes for you. Like, all of a sudden the homework is like a couple hours a night and it's not just homework for them is it? Woo, man, and so I've lost a lot of time this past semester just working on arithmetic and all that good stuff. And I still don't understand how they do math, what are they talking about? Where they have that different way of doing it and I'm like, no, just do it the old school way, Ella. I don't care what your teacher said, here's how we're doing it. Carry the one and...

And, but, interesting this past week because Ella was studying for a test and she started asking me about a man named Nelson Mandela. And so she started in, she said 'Dad, so, he spent most of his life in prison and then he got out and just became president.' I said, 'Ella, isn't this amazing? He was in prison because he was fighting for injustice and against apartheid and he was in all the way until he was seventy-two years old.' and I said, 'can you imagine what it had to feel like for him to get out and see the fulfillment of his dreams?' And it took me all the way back to when I was just a little bit older than Ella and my dad had come home from work and I asked him to go out and play some ball with me and but he was just glued to the tv and I was kinda pushing him, come on, lets go play Dad and she said, 'no, sit down, Joel, and watch this'. And so I sat down and I watched as old south African man was released from prison and I'll never forget the smile on that face. Remember that smile? Nelson Mandela's smile. One of the purest, most beautiful smiles and honest, like I actually spent too much time this week thinking, about like a top five list of smiles, right. And I'm not gonna waste your time today but I would put him at the top of the list. Why? because there's something behind the smile, isn't there. All that fighting and pushing and working and praying and waiting allowed him to become a president who then gave away the power to the people. Allowed him to be a man who loved boldly, who brought two groups together, brought two groups who were separate together for the first time ever. He became a prophet to a nation. Listen what he had to say, he said, 'difficulties break some men but make others, no axe is sharp enough to cut the soul of a sinner who keeps on trying, one who is armed with the hope that he will rise even in the end'.

I ask you a question today, if you were to go back and you could go talk to Nelson Mandela twenty years prior to his release, what advice would you give to him? You know, you'd probably say something to the effect of, you need to just keep holding on. Come on, keep going, don't give up, keep working, keep praying, keep waiting.

Second question is this, whatever advice you would give to him, who needs to receive that themselves today? Turn that advice right back around and whatever situation you have or you feel like you're done or you're done or overwhelmed or there's too much. Do you need to receive that same advice into your own soul today? I think when we get into the holiday season, we get to the end of the year a lot of things happen in our emotions, don't they? And we start to think about the regrets and the things that haven't happened yet, or the things that have happened already and it's overwhelming and we start thinking about those specifics, ok, why are my parents still separated, or it's another year gone by and we still have brokenness in our family. How does that still exist? Or maybe that person is not in your life yet. Or maybe you haven't found the job, you haven't found the dream, you haven't even found the purpose or the direction for your life. But we need to hear that advice to ourselves today.

Our story is a continuation of last week. So, it's Jesus, I'm sorry it's Mary and Joseph coming into the temple and they're bringing Jesus, the Christ child to be dedicated to be consecrated unto the Lord and when they come in they are met by two people, Simeon and Anna. Simeon and Anna have been waiting their entire life for this moment right here. And this is their Nelson Mandela moment of joy, ok? Their smiles, maybe they would have made the top five, I don't know but they got a big smile and they just, they exude joy in this scripture but we know this, that the joy, it came because of the waiting. I also know this, there's nothing in life that gets people more angry than waiting, right, come on, where's my people out there? I know you all are with me, you're gonna leave me hanging, ok.

I'm gonna start with the kids, that's where I'm gonna start, ok. I'll say as a dad, I'll say about anything, I'll say yes, to about anything and but it's just a matter of timing, ok. So, 'dad, can I have a cookie?' 'yes!' 'When?' 'After dinner.' 'No, Dad, come on!' 'I need it, now!' Write that word NOW. If that word had a face, I'd punch it, right. I didn't say that, who said that. That word now, that we always want things today, right here, right now, we need it but we know that 99 percent of us think other people need to learn how to wait as long as we don't have to get in line to register that complaint, right. And I know of for me, like I'm a young man and 'I want to drive, dad, can I drive?' 'Yes, you can.' 'Great, when?' 'When you're sixteen.' 'Oh, come on'. Or my little girl she says, 'Dad, you're never gonna let me get married.' I said, 'Ella, that's exactly right, you're never getting married. You don't need to get married'. No, I'm just kidding Ella, she doesn't laugh at that by the way. I'm just kidding, I say, 'if there was a guy in the long distant future, if there was a guy who came along and learned to love you sincerely and learned to treat you respectfully and you got married, that would make me happy, as long as you were over 40.' And I was dead, right, no I'm just kidding about the dead part, I'm kidding. Here's the deal, and tell me if you agree with this, I think generally, parents, is this true that, that what our kids want and this is not everything but for the most part, what our kids want we actually want that for them, don't we? But you know what, here's the deal, we just don't it yet or now, right. Because why? Because you need to suffer like I suffered. Now, that's the inside voice coming out. No, the real reason is because we know that they're not ready. So, ok the benefits of marriage they don't come unless you're mature enough to get to the benefits of marriage; or the benefits of driving, we know you don't get to the benefits of driving if you don't have hand eye coordination, know the rules of the road and know all these other things. You have to be ready to receive and so we know this concept, we know this idea, that a benefit given or a blessing given to somebody that's not ready, that blessing is not a blessing, that blessing, it's a curse.

And here we are, our spiritually mature eight-year-old selves coming to God the Father asking him for the car keys. What do you think he should say? No! What, no, are you crazy, come on. Or maybe, we're a little bit more mature and we say, 'can I drive?' And he says, 'not yet'. 'So, come on, I'm ready, and I need that.' But we need to understand something, there's a maturity that comes in this idea right here. There's a difference between 'no' and 'not yet'. It's take some maturity, some time to understand the difference but we as adults, listen, we've lost the art of waiting. And everything around our culture and technology leads and builds towards this idea to satiate the now, right. And you can sit at your desk and you can order any song or any book you can get it right there. You can actually sit on your couch and do all your Christmas shopping, isn't that amazing? Come on, where's my... And so, you can do just about anything. My friends told me about this app that you can actually pay someone to go wait in the line at one of these nice restaurants so you don't have to do that, right. Anybody tried it? Do we have anyone out there? Alright, we gotta check it out today or not, I don't know. You don't have to wait in line at Subway, so, it doesn't matter. But you can get anything just at the touch of a button, at the touch on your touch screen everything is fully accessible, we have lost this waiting.

Years ago Timex did a study one waiting for different things and I just want to share a few, I think they are kinda fun. It showed that we'll wait 13 seconds before we honk at a car in front of us that is stopped at a green light. Ok, we'll wait 26 seconds before we shush people who are talking in a movie theater. We'll wait 26 seconds before we take the seat of someone who has walked away. We'll wait 20 minutes for a blind date to show up before we leave. We'll wait 20 minutes for the last person to show up for Thanksgiving dinner before we dig in. Now, are you thinking the same thing that I'm thinking after hearing this? These are the most patient people that I have ever heard of in my life, right. Are you kidding me? 13 seconds, are you kidding me? I think D.C. law says 2 seconds and no more and then you have to honk your horn for 13 seconds, right. Or 26 seconds waiting for a chair to...we don't do that! No, what do we do? We go hover if they're taking too long on the entree we're starting to hover over their table, 'how we doin'? We turn into a waiter, 'can I take that plate for ya?' We'll sit down at the table and start dipping bread in the oil if they're not moving it along. A blind date, twenty minutes, I guess it depends on what your friend told them about how good lookin' they are, doesn't it? And I'll tell ya what, it was Nina, I'd still be waiting fifteen years later, I'll tell ya that much. I don't think she would have waited for thirty seconds, but it's too late now, I got that honor.

Here's the deal, we cannot stand waiting, can I get an amen? That's the truth, thanks for amening the opposite point of what I'm trying to make today. I appreciate that. I want to invite Dr. Matthews to come and we're gonna stand for the reading of God's word. Here's what so powerful about His word. Exactly what we're talking about today they are opposites, Simeon and Anna are opposite and so receive this story as it's read.

Dr. Matthews: Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was the custom of the Law

required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Pastor Joel: Amen, thank you. You can be seated. So, Luke our author is quite delicate about age, isn't he? How old are these people? They're **very old**, he says. Alright, ok. But I think there's some observation to make out of this scripture. They waited a long time and here's the thing that we noticed though, they weren't angry, they weren't bitter, they were not resentful they were quite the opposite, weren't they? These are kind, sensitive, aware of people. How did they become who they were to be able to present the Christ child? They became exactly who they were, in the waiting. It was in the waiting that God developed who they were and you are waiting for God to reveal Himself to you because you haven't gotten the reward yet. But Simeon teaches us something else he shows us that he got a revelation from God before the reward ever showed up. In other words, what's it saying? It's saying this, that God is not just in the reward but God is in the waiting. We need to know this, somebody needs to hear this today. You are waiting and frustrated and feel like where is God in all this. And God says, 'I'm exactly right where you are, developing you and making you. Our life goes wrong and we want to give up on our wait. We want to get over wait, we want to let go but hold on. Cause Simeon and Anna, they do something they are able to present and to welcome Christ into the world because they embraced awaiting. They didn't let go of their wait.

I love what City Father and Bishop Alfred Owens says, he says don't let your wait become your weight. Don't let your W.A.I.T. become your W.E.I.G.H.T. but let your wait become your worth. And they embrace the season of waiting and they allow themselves to be disciplined and moved and cultivated to become who God had destined them to be in this moment. There's a big difference between passive waiting and active waiting. One is over here, one is just sitting back the other is standing up. One is standing to the side the other is persevering and it's preparing. One, is just lazy and the other is in hope. The word hope in Hebrew is the word 'yachal' and it means actually to wait as well and so it's this word that is used in the planting portion of farming and so we see that is waiting for fruit and so it's the parable or it's the idea of sowing and reaping. We see in sewing there's an active waiting in sowing and we see when you sow a seed you're not making the fruit but you're preparing for the fruit.

So we're just gonna do something fun for just a minute. We're gonna do a word picture here today the difference between passive waiting and active waiting, this is really simple but here's what we see. We see we've got a plant with soil up here and passive waiting is this; you got your soil, you take some seed, you drop your seed in the soil and then you sit back. Boom, we're done ok. Active waiting is this, you got some soil you take that soil and you're gonna turn it over, right, you're gonna mix it up, you're gonna turn it. And then you're gonna take it and you're gonna till it, alright. You're gonna move it around and till it and make it ready for what is to

come. Then you're gonna take that seed and you're gonna drop that seed in the soil. And then you're gonna take some fertilizer, and you're gonna fertilize that soil and then you're gonna take some water and begin to water that soil. And, and both of these things are similar but, but we see that neither one actually controls the destiny of the fruit that is to come, right. You say actually the second one kind of does a lot more, no it doesn't. The destiny is in the seed. The nutrients are in the soil. But the soaking that comes through the servant who is actively waiting who is doing the best they can with what they have but they're also learning to trust. They're learning to lean in to God and they are learning and developing the character of God in their life. There's a reason I have never met a farmer that I didn't like. Because they know the value of working; and they know the value of waiting.

There's a fine line between passive waiting, active waiting, and controlling waiting, though isn't there. Some of us over step that bounds and, and it's those moments we say 'God, You're not on time, God, You're not working on my schedule. God, you need to show up, where are you?' And so, what do we do we decide to take the reins away. We decide to take over and we're gonna do, we're gonna make it... and that's when things go bad, don't they. Cause we're gonna push and we're gonna force it, and we're gonna water and we're gonna make this thing happen and it's going to happen and you can't stop it and what do we do, we just keep going. And what we do we flood out the opportunity that is in front of us and the seed gets choked because we try to force our way. Have you ever tried to force that promotion, you ever try to force that relationship? Hey, how'd that work out for you, how'd that go? Have you tried to force finances? Have you tried to force that move or that re-positioning? Waiting can be tough. It can be boring, let's be honest, it can be time consuming. It can be frustrating, it can really get your anger boiling and your anger going. We want what we want, when we want it, how we want it and we want that thing. Somebody say right now. Right now, we want it. We don't want to wait but I know this today that some of us are here and we are hurting today. Or some of us here in the past we have suffered. Why? Because we did not wait. And if we could have a do over, if we were honest we'd go back and we would not lose our wait because there are some addiction that happened in our lives, or there are some heartache, or there were some less than that occurred because we gave up our wait.

Think about how many babies Simeon and Anna probably saw come through the temple. How many years went by, well they were just all kinda, when's it gonna happen and Simeon's got to be gettin' anxious and the temptation was probably, ok, when is this gonna happen, well that baby looks good right there, that baby's beautiful, look at how, look they got a shine, they got some oil on them, that baby looks savioric, that's got to be the baby. I'm gonna bless the baby, we gotta do this, I'm gonna bless the baby. Bring the baby and I'm gonna bless it and I'm gonna be at peace and it's gonna be good. But no, he doesn't give up his wait, he continues to wait and cultivate.

But the American way is to make things happen, right. You gotta make it happen, you gotta go get it, you gotta hustle, come on, put it on your shoulders and make it happen. But, I'll tell ya what there's something to be said for waiting for a revelation from God and then moving with conviction. I'm walking a fine line here and I know it today, it's a tricky balance. And I just I wanna acknowledge the balance when it gets practical. Whew, you realize what kind of balance we're talking about? How about this, do we need to go get the fertility treatments or do we need

to keep going this path and see what happens? Whew, that's a hard decision. How about this one, do I sign up for that dating app or do I see if things happen in the natural course of relationship, or do I start pursuing those other jobs or do I start kicking my resume out there to all those different opportunities or do I remain faithful where God has set me. And here's the thing, what might be right for one person or one couple, that could actually look very different for another person or another couple. The point is this, it's not an exact science, we're not talking about science today. I'm talking about a relationship today. To get in relationship with Almighty God, to begin to cultivate and hear the voice of God.

Simeon, he was ready but he heard the prompting of the Lord. How did he know this was the Christ? Because he had spent time in His presence and hearing and listening to Him. The world will tell you about the hustle and there's something to be said about the hustle and there's actually good in that, isn't there? But my point is this, don't try to take the story away from God and don't try to start writing your own story line but listen, be aware, be sensitive to what God is trying to do. What is God trying to say? It's not just about what you want but it's about who you are becoming. Come on, I'm gonna say that one again because somebody needs to receive that and it will save you some serious heartache in life. It's not just about what you want, it's about who you're becoming and then that changes the equation, doesn't it. So then that hard job that you want to get out of, you want to get out of, no, instead God has you there because it's not about what you want, it's about who you are becoming and that it's the exact job that begins to develop your character into a different person that makes you ready for the reward. Where are we seeking and staying with God?

I think of Amy and Adam Hammond and they found each other later in life and they tried to have kids and for a number of years they couldn't have kids and so then they went down the adoption track, and that wasn't going well. So, they went down the fostering track and that didn't go to well too, if you know our system in D.C. government and but thank God for D.C. 127 who came alongside them. And eventually they got a little blessing, a little foster child and they started loving but they were open and they were vulnerable and they shared their wait, they shared that with their community with family and friends. And then that miracle call came. And it came from an extended family member because they had shared their wait with others. Now, there's a side sermon right there that I'm not gonna preach, it's not in my notes but I'm gonna at least say it. Most of us wait alone, don't we? But we need to wait with others, you need to share your wait with the people around you, cause then you know what, they can help carry your wait. And this is what happened right here. And so, they shared this and this extended family members who had spent their life taking care of little ones thinks of them because they shared, they were vulnerable in their wait and then they had also become active in their waiting. So, they're already caring for children and so they said then, that's the right couple and so, a mom has a baby and they can't take care of, they can't raise that child. And so, this woman calls up the Hammonds and a baby who had no home didn't just find a home she found a name. Little Bella Hammonds came into D.C. come on. And Bella showed up and Bella is just so beautiful. And here's the thing, would they have written their story line like this? No. But could it be a more perfect, more beautiful story, no! They waited.

We try to force God to work on our schedule but let me tell you something today. He may not come when I want Him but He plans to be on time, doesn't He? Come one, He may not be on my

schedule, He may not do what I want Him to do when I want Him to do it but He plans to be on time. And the enemy whispers plans and he whispers different purposes and he tells ya something different and gets you off the road but the enemy has no place but God's plans and God's purposes will prevail. And we say, God speed up, God, come on, let's go what we doin' here let's move. And God says I'm gonna slow things down. I don't like that but He knows that I need some perseverance, He knows that I need to develop some long suffering. I need to develop some patience in my life, He knows I need to learn what a revelation from God is. He knows that maybe I need to go broke before I get some money. He knows that I need to experience pain before I step into power. He knows that I need to take a look down at the bottom, I need to go under before I come back over. Some of us, it is a little taste of hell in our life but guess what. God has some heaven around the corner, we will not accept that reality but He will take us to a new place.

Nelson Mandela, imagine if fifty years earlier he would have become president, who know what would have happened. But he had suffering and pain in his path and it led him to be a president that gave power back to the people. Anna and Simeon were the same way. Simeon waited in expectation, Anna waited in faith. Simeon was this man of readiness, a man who, who lived in obedience to the promptings of God. And he knew this idea that waiting with anxiety is not waiting, that's worrying but waiting with expectation, that's faithfulness. And then there's Anna over here. Anna didn't get a revelation from God, did she? She was just hanging out and here's Anna and I think a lot of us, we relate more with Anna, don't we? I don't have a revelation, I don't, I don't know what's next, I don't got my five year plan, I don't know what's coming down the pipe but somehow Anna got in the mix with the miracle, didn't she? It's because she was praying to God and she was in proximity with His people.

Anna's an interesting story it says that she was seven years married and then became a widow. So, we know in that culture that around 12 or 13 years of age, you would get married so that puts her about 19 or 20 years old. She should go according to culture, go and get remarried. It says that she's from the tribe of Asher, one of the lost tribes, on the verge, potentially on the verge of extinction as a tribe. So, the greatest worth that culture would have told her in that season of life would be to take her femininity and to use that by getting remarried and then childbearing. She didn't do it, no, instead she remained single and devout unto the Lord and God chose her to usher in the new covenant. He chose her right there. I wonder if there's a story line there that somebody needs to hear today. Cause culture is telling you what to do or somebody is pushing you or prodding you or they're putting their expectations on your head on what to do but you need to take something from Anna today and you need to hear this today. You be who God has called you to be. I don't care if you're at the top of the ladder and people are trying to cut you down, I don't care if you're at the bottom of the ladder and people are trying to push you away or whatever is going on, I don't care if you're married or if you have kids or you're single, I don't care what it is you don't let culture tell you what you need to do, you listen to the voice of God and be who He has called you to be because Anna knows this. Listen, what do you want is not the question, the question is this, what does He want.

Say, I want to do that but I don't know what I wanna be, what do I do? Well, Anna was in prayer, she was in proximity, what does God want? I'm not saying today, you do whatever you wanna do, I'm not saying that. I'm saying you be who God has called you to be. For Anna's sake that

was actually harder, it was harder to go that route, wasn't it? But she did it, she pursued Christ, she went after Him. I wonder what you do want though. Do you want contentment, success, a relationship, maybe you want kids, maybe you want that promotion, they're all good things but should they be our focus is the question?

Andy Stanley said, it's not what I am here for but it's who I am here for. Her waiting was about a who, it wasn't about a what. Those that devote themselves to themselves will end up only with themselves. Those that devote themselves to others will end up more than with themselves. Lurking in the shadows of what we really want are the values that we really need. We think what we want is what we want, right. We think what we want is what we really want but then we get what we want and we realize that's not what we want, right. I hear this all the time, I wanna get married. And then a couple years later - whew - I want some freedom, right. I want that job and then a couple years later, that job is horrible, I can't stand that job.

But Simeon and Anna they teach us something, don't they? They show us that our wants actually can be reshaped, if we're active in waiting. And they show us this, and Simeon says my eyes, remember this? Dr. Matthew read this so beautifully and poignantly, my eyes have seen your salvation, and he knows something. Salvation is not in the what, if there's anything that's in the what wouldn't it be salvation, you'd take us from that, and you'd take us to something, it's in the what, no. He understands that salvation is not in the what, salvation is in the who. What we think we want is not really what we want. But Christ is the answer, Christ is the meaning to all our wants. If we're just willing to wait. God will actually reshape our outcome over time. He'll reshape our wants. They wanted political provision, that's what they wanted, to overcome an authoritative regime. They wanted political provision, they wanted to get out of Jerusalem or a new Jerusalem but that's not what God gave them. He said, no, that's not what you're gonna get, you're not gonna get what you want, you're gonna get what I want. And you know that was? Eternal life. I got something better for ya. It's different.

And can we just be real for a second today. We're praying for the Douglasses. And we're praying for them and they're praying and we're all praying and we didn't get what we wanted did we. 288 days of blessing far beyond what the doctors said but we wanted more, didn't we? We prayed for more and we didn't get that but just as in this scripture, they didn't get what they want but God had something greater than what they wanted and just as we wanted more days, God has something greater. And Romans 8:18 I woke up yesterday morning with that scripture in my spirit. I can't even remember; did I say that today? I don't even remember. But it talks about this, this present suffering, it cannot hold to what is to come. The glory of God revealed in us and so the suffering that we understand right now, His glory is greater than our wants and He gives us more.

I think the holidays, I'll close with this. The holidays are like a microscope aren't they and it focuses us in on all those little things on the blessings and the things that we should be focused on and the good things and the priorities but it also focuses, and I can't say that word, it focuses us in on the hurts as well. And on the anger and on the loss, I know that's there for many of us. It focuses us in on the not yet and it becomes a hard season for so many of us and it's tough and somehow our culture has turned advent upside down. And so, on this season of advent leading up

to the day of the birth of Christ we get more and more stressed, don't we? And we get busier and busier, angrier and angrier and more upset and more frustrated and it's the opposite where advent is supposed to be a lessening of yourself, and a time of reflection. And the closer we get the more we think about the wonder and the gift that God has given to us and the reorientation that He gave to our souls but we're so locked in and we just give in, don't we? We just give in to what culture says and here's what you gotta do and here's who you gotta be. And if you're anything like me, and I want to invite our worship team, worship team if you would go ahead and come and you can start playing. But if you're anything like me, I often don't have the discipline, I just kinda give in, I don't have the discipline to stop, to pause to reorient my mind and to allow God to bring His peace into me, so I'm gonna be your discipline today, ok. I'm gonna be your discipline and I'm gonna give you back a few minutes, and in these few minutes I'm gonna open up the altars and if you'd like to come forward, many of us need to reposition ourselves, we actually need to get in to a new position or a new posture before God and when we do God does something new in us. So, I'm gonna open up the altars or if you want to stay in your seat you can do that. But in these next few moments we're just gonna seek the Lord, we're gonna worship Him, we're gonna stop, we're gonna pause, we're gonna wait, we're gonna reflect, we're gonna actively seek the presence of God to over-take our lives.

And so, Jesus, we do exactly that right now. We come to You in your wonderful blessing and presence God, and we take these next few moments and pray, Lord that You would yank us out of our rhythm, Lord pull us out of our habits, we pray. And now we ask that You would reorient our minds and help us to be active in waiting and Lord we pray that all of our hurts and struggles and trials and not yet's and all these different things Lord, I pray that we would come to You and that the peace of Christ which transcends our understanding, that it would guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, so we give You these few moments and pray that Your kingdom would come right now.